

Malacca Harbour.

The following account of Malacca harbour is taken from the "Singapore Free Press" of 1834, and is reprinted by the kind permission of the editor.

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The present condition of the roads, and the difficulty of landing, except at nearly high water, are a matter of notoriety and people sometimes wonder how Malacca ever came to be selected as the site for a port, but a reference to old residents in the place, to early accounts of it, and to native traditions, shews that things were not always so, and may, perhaps, indicate the way in which the change came about.

A tradition exists among the natives that Malacca was not originally situated on its present site, but Telok Dalam (deep bay) on the other side of the Panchur, a rocky point on the coast about thirteen miles N. W. of Malacca, where tin has been found on the shore below high-water mark. This tradition bears testimony to the fact of Malacca having once possessed a good anchorage close inshore, but, finding appearances against it, locates the original port elsewhere.

The oldest resident in the place states that his father remembered when Pulau Upeh (a lateritic island lying about two and a half miles a little N. of W. from the town) was only a pistol-shot from the shore, and it is said that about thirty years ago or so, there was a house at Limbongan (two miles from town on the road to Tanjong Kling and nearly opposite Pulau Upeh) in a situation which is now 300 or 400 yards out from the shore. It is also known that land which was leased out by Government in that neighbourhood not very many years ago has disappeared altogether owing to the encroachment of the sea.

VALENTYN says: "There are two islets in its (Malacca's) vicinity—*Ilha das Naos* (Pulau Java, nearly opposite the end of the pier) within a gun-shot from the town, and *Ilha das Pedras* (Pulau Upeh) from where they got the stones to build houses etc. with, beyond the range of gun-shot.* The Portuguese carracks and galleons used to anchor between these two islets in four or five fathoms of water." There are now only about two fathoms.

HAMILTON, writing the same time, says; "The Road for Shipping is at too great a Distance to be defended by the Fort, the Shallowness of the Sea obliging them to be above a League off, which is a very great Inconveniency." But this latter is clearly an exaggeration, for he says shortly after: "At Malacca the Streights are not above four Leagues broad," whereas they are nine or ten; and from other parts of his narrative it is evident that too much faith must not be placed in him.

The *Commentaries* of ALBUQUERQUE, wherein an account is given of the founding of Malacca by PARIMICARA (*Apramasasura*) who had settled on the Pago, a tributary of the Muar, after his expulsion from *Singapura*, state that that prince was induced by some fishermen who lived on the Malacca River "to go and settle there, both on account of a fertile plain called Bintao three leagues distant along a river, wherein large crops of rice could be grown," and "because the harbour was commodius and very deep with good water."

We find in different places in the *Commentaries* the following expressions:—

"he (the King of Malacca) desired Afonso Dalboquerque would order his ships to withdraw from right *in front of the port* ;"

"he (Albuquerque) ordered the small vessels to withdraw and *lie off outside the port* ;"

"and to burn also all the other ships that *lay in the port* ;"

* i. e. from the fortress.

“among the foreign ships which were *in the port* of Malacca;”

“alongside of this tower” (i.e. “a keep of four stories height along the sea” which Albuquerque built close to his own fortress)

“one of our ships of two hundred tons burthen could come whenever it was desired.”

CRAWFURD quotes DE BARROS to the following effect for a description of the Town of Malacca at the time ALBUQUERQUE took it: “Our people, although they did not see majestic structures of stone and mortar, or ramparts, or towers, or indeed any other kind of defence, beheld notwithstanding a town extending along the beach for a good league, and *ranged along the shore, many merchant vessels.*”

CRAWFURD himself says, referring to the two islands already mentioned “it was near these that Albuquerque with his armada cast anchor in 1511, and at which also were wont to anchor the largest caragues of the Portuguese in five and six fathoms water. This part of the roads is now only accessible to small craft, owing to the growth of extensive mud-banks dry at low water, and the anchorage of vessels of burthen is at the inconvenient distance of two miles from the shore.”

In the Commentaries of ALBUQUERQUE we find the following statement made by RUY DE ARAUJO when advising that the bridge of Malacca “ought to be attacked before anything for if they took that and made themselves strong in it, our people would be placed just *between the city and the inhabitants of Upe*, and the power of King divided into two parts.”

The “city” was on the Stadt House side of the river. Further on we find: “and while he (the King of Malacca) was thus occupied with the fortifying of the stockades, a Javanese headman, who was called *Utemutarajah*, who *lived in the Settlement of Upe*, and had about five or six thousand Javanese slaves of his own, or of his sons and sons-in-law, a very rich man, and one who traded very extensively to all parts of the

world, sent a present of sandal-woods to Afonso Dalboquerque, and secretly begged a safeguard for himself *and for all that settlement wherein he lived.*"

And again: "Afonso Dalboquerque ordered his Captains that *upon the territory of Utemutarajah* they should make no requisition."

Later again we find: "Utemutarajah gave opportunity to the Moors who lived in his *district of Dupe*† to make use of their own coinage and prevented ours from being current;"

and

"But Utemutarajah took so little heed of this hint to mend his ways that Afonso Dalboquerque again sent word to say that on an occasion when a certain Naire, who had turned Christian, a man in the employment of the *Meirinho*§ was walking in the *District of Dupe*, he had ordered his arrest;"

and

"He began to construct *in Dupe* strong stockades surrounded with ditches."

From the above extracts the following conclusion may reasonably be drawn; that when ALBUQUERQUE took Malacca, it was a harbour with deep water and a fine sandy bay extending in a curve from the river mouth westwards to the rocky eminence called Pulau Upeh. In all the mentions of Upeh, nothing is said about its being an island, on the contrary, everything, particularly the passage "he began to construct in Dupe strong stockades surrounded with ditches" points to its being then part of the mainland and of the town.

In the time of VALENTYN, the sea had already worn a way through the sandy shore and turned the western end of Upeh into an island; being barred from further encroachments on the west by a rocky ridge, its destructive tendencies found free play on the sandy coast in the opposite directions and continued to operate till they had made a channel about two miles wide, and threatened the high road which skirts the coast, and which is now protected by a series of groins.

†D'Upe.

§An officer whose duty it is to arrest criminals: the origin of the word, still current, for Inspector of Police "Brenio."

From the time of the opening of this channel dates, no doubt, the silting which has spoilt the harbour of Malacca, and brought it to its present condition,—a condition which is rapidly growing worse.